Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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For Immediate Release: June 13, 2011
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WASHINGTON, D.C.—Deputy Secretary of the Interior David J. Hayes today announced Billings, Montana as the location for the first of six regional government-to-government tribal consultations regarding the Trust Land Consolidation component of the Cobell Settlement.

“These regional consultations will provide valuable input in developing an implementation strategy that will benefit tribal communities and help free up trust lands,” said Deputy Secretary Hayes. “The consultation process is fundamental to respecting our government-to-government relationship with the tribes and I look forward to meeting with Tribal Leaders from the Rocky Mountain and Great Plains regions.”

On May 27, 2011, U.S. Senior District Judge Thomas F. Hogan granted communication between representatives of the United States and Cobell class members only in regards to the Trust Land Consolidation component of the Settlement. The dates and locations for the remaining five regional tribal consultations will be announced in the coming weeks. For additional information on the First Tribal Consultation, please click here.

BACKGROUND:

The Cobell settlement was approved by Congress on November 30, 2010 (Claims Resolution Act of 2010) and signed by President Obama on December 8, 2010. The $3.4 billion Cobell Settlement will address the Federal Government’s responsibility for trust accounts and trust assets maintained by the United States on behalf of more than 300,000 individual Indians. A fund of $1.5 billion will be used to compensate class members for their historical accounting, trust fund and asset mismanagement claims.

In addition, to address the continued proliferation of thousands of new trust accounts caused by the "fractionation" of land interests through succeeding generations, the Settlement establishes a $1.9 billion fund for the voluntary buy-back and consolidation of fractionated land interests. The land consolidation program will provide individual American Indians with an opportunity to obtain cash payments for divided land interests and free up the land for the benefit of tribal communities.

Furthermore, up to $60 million will be set aside to provide scholarships for higher education for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

More information can be found at www.doi.gov/cobell